

Housing / Dining / Financial Aid Policy Changes – FAQ

April 19, 2017

Quick Summary:

- The College has changed housing and dining plans for first-year students to create equitable access to all housing types, provide greater food security, and promote the residential educational community.
- The College proposes to change financial aid policy to ensure that these changes will not create additional costs for students who receive financial aid.
- Current policy does not acknowledge the lower cost of OSCA housing and thus provides a substantially disproportionate financial aid benefit to students who choose OSCA as compared to students who prefer or need College housing and dining.
- The proposed policy adjusts for part of this imbalance, but will continue to provide a substantive financial benefit to OSCA members while supporting the allocation of increased financial aid to students who live and dine with Residential Education and College Dining Services.

What is the current housing and dining requirement?

Oberlin College believes that having students living and dining together fosters community, discourse, and debate. Therefore, all students are required to live in [college housing](#) (Res Ed) or an [Oberlin Student Cooperative Association](#) (OSCA) co-op, and to participate in one of the dining programs through graduation. A small number of students are released from this requirement each year, primarily due to approved accommodations or enrollment that exceeds available spaces.

What is the proposed change to the housing/dining policy for first-year students and why did you make it?

Beginning with the class of 2021, first-year students will pay a single fee for College housing that will allow them access to any housing option for which they are eligible, assigned by seniority. Thus, students who live in a traditional double room during their first years at Oberlin and choose a single room, Village housing, or other option in their later years will have those costs distributed evenly across their period of enrollment. This change will allow every student to choose the housing option that best suits them rather than forcing students with financial concerns to choose housing that may not meet their educational needs.

Beginning with the class of 2021, first-year students will be required to participate in the 300-meal plan. This will ensure that all students will have greater food security without having to

make sacrifices relative to cost. This adjustment increases the baseline dining plan from 2 meals to 3 meals a day.

There will be no additional costs for these changes to students who receive need-based financial aid, as financial aid budgets will continue to cover 100% of demonstrated need and thus will increase proportionately.

What is the current financial aid policy?

Under existing policy, financial aid for currently enrolled students is calculated based on a cost of attendance that assumes the 14-meal plan and a double occupancy room. Currently enrolled students who have been released from the housing and dining requirement (currently fulfilled by living in college housing and dining in CDS and/or living and dining in OSCA) receive a \$1500 reduction to the estimated cost of attendance and thus their financial aid award. This adjustment to the financial aid budget of off-campus students is determined by an assessment of the costs of living and dining off-campus as compared to living and dining with the College.

How would financial aid policy change under the new proposal?

For current/returning students, there will be no changes, with one exception: for returning students who have been released from the housing requirement, the figure used to estimate cost of attendance will be reduced by \$2000 instead of \$1500. This is the first such change to this figure in fifteen years and reflects an assessment of the current costs of housing and dining off campus and the gap between those costs and the costs of College housing and dining used to determine financial aid awards.

For first year students enrolling in Fall 2017 and thereafter, financial aid will be calculated based on the cost of the required Residential Education and Campus Dining plans (300 meals per semester/1 rate for all room types). Students who are not assigned to Residential Education or CDS for their housing/and dining will have their financial aid award adjusted as follows: For students who dine in OSCA, the figure used to estimate cost of attendance will be reduced by \$1000 per year. For students who both dine and live in OSCA, the figure will be reduced by \$2000 per year.

The rationale for this policy reflects the College's strategy to balance best practices in financial aid, which assign aid to students proportional to their educational expenses, with the value of OSCA to its residents and the Oberlin community. A full transition to aid-to-cost would mean that students who chose OSCA would receive financial aid to cover the costs charged by OSCA, which would cause a significant reduction to their aid. The proposed policy continues to provide a significant additional financial benefit to students who participate in OSCA that is not available to other students who neither live nor dine through Res Ed and CDS.

How do these policies compare in terms of dollars?

2017-18 Returning Student

14 meals 6920
Double room 7482
Total 14402

2017 – 2018 First-Year Student

300 meals 7990
Room rate 7872
15862

No reduction for OSCA

14862 (reduction – dining only)
13862 (reduction – housing and dining)
Reduction applies to OSCA

Incoming students who choose OSCA will have a budget of \$14,862 if they dine only and \$13,862 if they choose housing and dining in OSCA. How much each student pays is dependent on the financial aid process, which determines each student's family contribution. For example, in 2016 - 2017, OSCA has a posted dining rate of \$3,492 per year and a double room rate of \$4,710.

With the proposed financial aid policy changes, a student who receives full aid (estimated family contribution of \$0) in 2017-2018 and chooses to eat with OSCA, they would be budgeted \$6,990 for dining in 2017 - 2018 (based on the 300-meal standard and including the \$1,000 reduction for dining in OSCA). **If OSCA's rate were unchanged, this student would still receive \$3,498 in financial aid beyond OSCA's charge for dining.**

With the proposed financial aid policy changes, a student who receives full aid (estimated family contribution of \$0) in 2017-2018 and chooses to dine and live in OSCA (double room), they would be budgeted \$13,862 for housing dining in 2017 - 2018. **If OSCA's rate were unchanged, this student would still receive \$5,660 in financial aid beyond OSCA's charge for dining and housing (double room).**

Why is the College making this change?

Oberlin values the contribution of OSCA to its learning and living community and thus will continue to subsidize the choice to live in OSCA. The change preserves this investment but also addresses the College's responsibility to provide equitable financial support to all students for housing and dining costs, whether or not they choose OSCA.

As an equity principle, the awards for students who have lower housing and/or dining costs are accordingly lowered. OSCA students are included in the group of students who have reduced costs for housing and dining, but their awards are not currently adjusted based on the lower cost of OSCA housing/dining as compared to CDS. This policy creates a condition in which students who do not receive housing/dining from Res Ed/CDS are not treated equitably. The proposed policy is designed to address this equity gap.

What is the relationship between OSCA and the College?

OSCA is an independent non-profit organization which has a contract with the College to provide housing and dining to Oberlin students. The College values its long relationship with OSCA and recognizes its importance to the learning experience of generations of students. For this reason, it credits students who live and dining in OSCA with fulfillment of their College housing and dining requirement. In this way, OSCA has and will continue to receive a special status relative to other options for non-CDS/Res Ed housing and dining.

Therefore, even if OSCA is strategically labeled “on campus” at certain moments, its separate corporate status and its cost to students are the key factors for assessing its relationship to College financial aid policy. Put differently - if OSCA were part of Res Ed/CDS, and students paid the College for the OSCA housing and dining program, an equitable financial aid policy would require that student awards be adjusted based on the cost of choosing this option. On campus or off campus, the principle of providing aid that covers the actual cost is the key equity principle.